



# “Black Panther”: Afrofuturism at Its Finest

By Karina Karbo-Wright

**A** frofuturism is the convergence of Black science, Black fiction and Black art. Blackness is beauty. Ryan Coogler captured these profound ideals in his massively successful 2018 film, “Black Panther.”

The mixture of unfathomable wealth, knowledge and technology is something new to Black film. “Black Panther” dared to move away from the reductive Hollywood Black narrative and created a new one for all Black people did not create an Afro-film we, the people of the African and communal harmony, beautiful dream that lingers seated within our current is missing. Due to our origins people is unique. Rather than our foundation within the of the cultures represented different tribes. This was costume designer Ruth E. Carter. This country’s beauty is a slave descendant’s dream about our history made into a reality. Yet, this dream is still fraught with the real tensions of Black identity in a white world.

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to aspire to and build on. Coogler on who we should be, but who Diaspora, can be. blend of advanced technology the city of Wakanda fulfills a in the African Diaspora. Deeply culture is a sense that something of slavery, our foundation as a a tradition of “roots,” we stake dispossession and culmination through many of Wakanda’s intended by “Black Panther” Carter. This country’s beauty is

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With its signature blend of advanced technology and communal harmony, the city of Wakanda fulfills a beautiful dream that lingers in the African Diaspora. Deeply seated within our current culture is a sense that something is missing. Due to our origins of slavery, our foundation as a people is unique. Rather than a tradition of “roots,” we stake our foundation within the dispossession and culmination of the cultures represented through many of Wakanda’s different tribes. This was intended by “Black Panther” costume designer Ruth E. Carter. This country’s beauty is a slave descendant’s dream about our history made into a reality. Yet, this dream is still fraught with the real tensions of Black identity in a white world.

The stark contrast between Killmonger and T’Challa embodies that tension. During T’Challa’s first visit to the afterlife, he meets his father on a spiritual plane separate from the rest of the world. T’Challa’s white robe contrasts with the deep blue and purple background, representing his divergence from his father’s legacy. Together they share a bond, which serves as a healing moment for T’Challa after his father’s untimely death.

Conversely, Killmonger’s experience is one Black America knows all too well. When Killmonger crosses over to the spiritual plane, he does not get to heal. Like T’Challa, he sees his father, but the moment is rooted in sadness and trauma. Suddenly, Killmonger is a child again, hopeless as his father cries and laments what he could have done for his son had his life been spared. The stereotype of disappearing Black fathers and the weight of decades of historical trauma Black people carry on their shoulders every day—that is Killmonger’s spiritual experience.

From his perspective, Blackness has been suppressed, drowned in the waves of whitewashed American history. In his dying breaths, Killmonger says, “Bury me in the ocean with my ancestors who jumped from ships, ‘cause they knew death was better than bondage.”

Blackness in the future is so unfathomable to people because our past has been erased from our culture. That is why “Black Panther” was so revolutionary to audiences; the idea of Black advancement is so unfamiliar. Perhaps the most important impact of this film was its influence on Black children. Not only did they gain a whole new cast of strong Black heroes to look up to, but also a mainstream portrayal of strong Black families, communities and intelligence.

Afrofuturism acts as a thru-line in the film, capturing the ever-present tension between the anguish of the past and the gorgeous potential of the future. It grapples with Black suffering without allowing it to define the Black future. As stated by Mark Dery in his 1994 essay “Black to the Future,” the purpose of Afrofuturism is to take back and recreate Black identity and to move forward with a renewed strength gleaned from the pain of our past.”

“Black Panther” is the beam of sunlight shining on the bottom of the ocean, the grave of the diaspora’s ancestors. It is, in essence, our liberation.

*“Can a community whose past has been de-liberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures? Furthermore, isn’t the unreal estate of the future already owned by the technocrats, futurologists, streamliners, and set designers—white to a man—who have engineered our collective fantasies?” - Mark Dery, “Black to the Future” (1994).*